

Tom, Dick, and Harry—Et Cætera

BY JOHN LUTHER LONG

TOM, Dick, and Harry—besides Et Cætera—starved genteelly in the winter, and lived “upon the land”—as the militarists say—(and the sea, too!) in summer. Harry was a great composer, and would weave, in the haleyon summer-time, to the diapason of the waves, the perfume of the breezes, the flame of the lightning, or the thunder of the storms, splendid melodies for the winter.

Now, the composer, like geniuses always, had his unique passions. One of these was, like Prometheus, for fire. So the four would steal saturninely far up the beach, most often at night, and, with a bundle of newspapers, a bottle of coal-oil, and a box of matches, concealed about their several persons, gather driftwood in the lee of one of the wrecks which showed their bleaching ribs above the sand, and fire the stout oak. Then they would sit, like uncanny red shades, in the light of the flames and eat the things Dick and Et Cætera had provided against the hunger the flames produced.

And it happened upon one of these *noctes ambrosianæ*—as they had named them—never to be forgotten, that Thomas, who was a lawyer when he had clients, in the winter, and a poet when he had none, in the summer, sitting in the magical, mysterious light of the fire, when anything, even a good joke, is possible, wrote as follows:

“Know all men, by these presents, that I, John Smith, of Smithfield, smith, being of sound mind, memory, and understanding, do hereby make and ordain this, my last will and testament, in the following words, to wit, hereby revoking and making void any and all wills, codicils, or writings and memoranda in the nature thereof, by me at any time heretofore made.

“*Imprimis*: Despairing of finding an honest man in my own country, and be-

ing in imminent danger of shipwreck, and being possessed, in my own right, in fee simple, of some thirty millions of pounds, I hereby give, devise, and bequeath unto him who shall first take into his hand this writing meant to be and to be taken as and for my will, he, his heirs and assigns, from, and of, whatsoever country he may be, each and every, the said some thirty millions of pounds, *provided*, only, that he shall prove to the satisfaction of my executors that he is an honest man.

“*Item*: I limit the title and possession of the said some thirty millions of pounds, only in this, that I desire my devisee to erect to my memory, should the imminent shipwreck take place, a suitable monument reciting the above bequest, his own certitude of honesty, and his gratitude.

“Signed, sealed, published, and declared, before these witnesses, who, in my presence, and the presence of each other, at my request, have attached their names as witnesses, as and for the last will and testament of me, the said John Smith, smith, on the first day of August, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and nine.

JOHN SMITH. (Seal.)

“*Witness*:

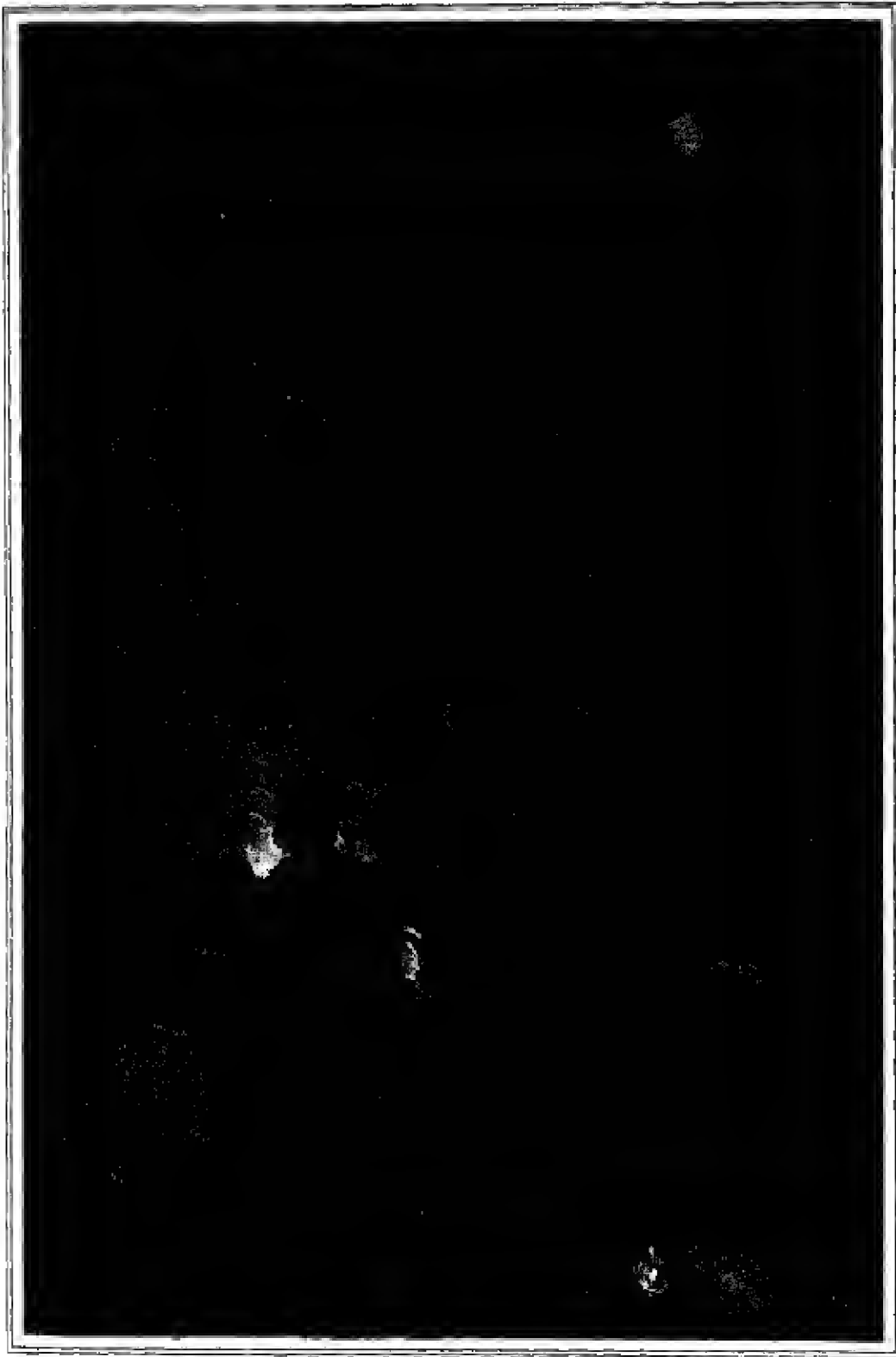
Harry Grosskopf,
Richard Shay,
Et Cætera.”

He enclosed the document in a bottle (making certain that it was quite empty), drove the cork well home, and threw it into the sea.

“Do you suppose,” mused Dick, on the way home, “that there *might* be such a possibility as a John Smith, smith, living in a place called Smithfield?”

Richard always had these strange thoughts.

“And having thirty millions of pounds!” gibed Harry. “Oh, of course!”



Drawn by F. Walter Taylor

"KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS"

Three days later, when we were having exercise with the medicine ball on the upper beach, something collided with the toe of the little Etc., heading off the ball from the surf.

"It's our bottle!" cried the composer, taking it rudely out of the hands of Et Cetera.

"No," said Dick. "It is open."

"Of course!" declared Et Cetera. "Some one has found it and taken the will out of it!"

"What now?" asked the cryptical Dick.

"Now there'll be trouble," said little Et Cetera.

"Trouble?" questioned Richard.

"Some one will go to get that thirty millions!" said Harry, with the solemn certitude which was always his.

"Nonsense!" laughed the poet. But the prophecy did not leave his mind.

"I believe," said Dick, gayly, "that we've got Tom frightened!"

"Well," said Etc., comfortlessly, "you never can tell!"

"I've known some very—very"—the poet looked all about fearfully—"strange things to happen!"

"From fool jokes!" supplemented Harry, as comfortlessly.

Tom was easily frightened—about an injury to another—and the worried look did not leave his face for several hours. But then he wrote a poem to the saffron sun—which he had seen to be saffron that very morning—over the sea—for the first time—and in the glow of it forgot to be further frightened.

Even though Putter Peterson—as he was called, though his name was Peter Patterson—asked him, on the beach, three days later, as he was patrolling his "watch" (he was a life-guard), whether he, who had known Peter for many years, would be willing to certify that he was an honest man.

"Certainly!" said Thomas, at once, never thinking of the bottle.

"Peter Patterson, I hereby certify," he wrote, once more with the composer's fountain-pen, "that this is an honest man."
THOMAS DUXN."

"Thank you," said Peter, hurrying away.

The poet had to think constantly of his poems if he would live, and the com-

poser of his compositions if he would do likewise, and Richard and the little Et Cetera of things to eat, for the same reason, so that it happened that neither of them thought of the certificate of honesty until a month had passed. Then Et Cetera, who usually had these thoughts, said very suddenly one day:

"Putter Peterson found that will!"

"What will?" snapped the composer, returning from the melody which whispered in his mind and had taken him afar. For the tone of Et Cetera was such as to fix the attention of even a composer with a melody whispering in his mind.

"The one Thomas wrote and put into the bottle," said Richard, with as great conviction as Et Cetera.

"Lord!" said the lawyer, under his breath.

"Let no guilty man escape," laughed the composer, clutching the poet as if to detain him.

"Stop!" cried Dick, forcibly taking Harry's arm away. "Don't you see that Tom is scared! *He's* serious, and we've got to be. For we are all as guilty as he. Haven't we all from time to time taken foolish messages out of bottles on the seashore? Did any one of us ever take them seriously?"

"That's nice," said the poet, comfortably.

"If there should be—tri—trouble," said Etc., bravely, "we'll all meet it together—like we do the return of a manuscript!"

"But a joke gone wrong is a fearful thing," sighed Tom. "Worse than any returned manuscript or score."

They were not far from the station where Peter served, and all went there.

"Pete," said the captain, "got funny about a month ago, deaved all his money, which I keeps for the boys, and has went to England?"

The captain shook his head despairingly as he daiked a little more tar on the rigging of the life-mast.

"But he'll soon be back, eh?" suggested the poet, cheerfully.

The captain shook the poet and all the guilty four a negative. He slashed vengefully at the stay.

"We'll never see him no more," he said, hopelessly. "Pete's a good boy."

Right to the core. But that there's a mighty woozy country—England, Ireland, France, and Wales!"

"Phew!" whispered Et Cætera, whose geography was at least better than that. "There is a Smithfield in England. Some one was hurned there," ended Et Cætera, very terribly. "Or something?" a bit uncertainly.

The guilty poet trailed off through the deep sand to the shack of a house Pete had built for Mrs. Pete—mostly out of driftwood. And when they arrived—for they all guiltily trailed after the poet, to make him think he was less guilty because they were, too—by the process of dilution—it seemed as if there were no guilt anywhere in the world. The desert of sand on the beach bloomed here into a garden—flowers nearly covered Pete's rough carpentry from view. A ring-neck snipe whistled cheerfully in a wooden cage, a board-yard dog leaped upon them, begging, in a language they did not understand, for a peanut to balance upon his nose, all nature smiled—where Pete had built his shack and caged The Belle of the Beach.

And Mrs. Pete was singing:

"Sweet hour of prayer,
Sweet hour of prayer,
Thy wings shall my petition bear—"

And when the guilty party came upon her, no prettier sight might they—or any one—wish to see! She was bowing and rising over a tub of foaming suds, lifting a garment to the light to look through it and see whether she had washed it clean. She had a touselled tow head and a wide mouth; yes, but in it were pretty white teeth, and there were wonderful blue eyes under a fine roof of brows, while a supple young waist and trim ankles and a tucked-up skirt completed a picture of The Belle of the Beach—as they had called her when Pete won her from all the rest of the life-crew.

On the floor, tumbling, sleeping, sucking thumbs, were four other towheads—not one of them crying.

"Law!" smiled Mrs. Pete, when the guilty party entered, wiping her hands on her blue apron—shaking with them, smiling, without the least embarrassment.

The poet shifted from foot to foot for a moment, then said:

"Mrs. Pete, they tell me that Pete has gone away?"

"Now *who* told you?" pouted the girl, vexedly.

"The captain," said the composer.

"That's what I thought. He couldn't keep his face shut if he was a mummy!"

"Where can he be found?" asked the poet.

"Law! I dun'no'," said Mrs. Pete. "He just skipped out. I suppose that duffer has told you the whole thing?" she asked, experimentally.

"Yi—yes," nodded the poet.

"Durn him!"

"Bib—but, Mrs. Pete," stammered the poet, "we—we sympathize—wi—with you and want to help Pete—ti—to—"

"What are you sympathizin' *for*?" asked the puzzled Mrs. Pete.

Neither the voluble composer nor the sprightly poet had an answer ready. Dick was meditating one, and Etc. had about got one ready, when Mrs. Pete continued.

"You want Pete to git that there money, I expect," she went on. "Well, of course you do. And you needn't think we'll be stuck up when we do git it. You 'n' us 'll be just as good friends as ever. But all these livers here, these beach-combers 'd be so jealous of 'im they'd rob 'im on sight. You don't have to. You're rich."

"Yi—yes," agreed the poet. "Bib—but what's his address in—in London?"

"Law! what do I know? I wouldn't know if he told me. He just takes all the money he can rake and scrape and goes and gits that money. He's got about enough to git over. But, say, if he don't find that there Smith, he'll have to work it to git back. But he'll git the money, all right. You bet he's an honest man—my Pete is. Hasn't he got your certificate to that effect? And don't you know what an honest man is? Ain't you honest yourself?"

"Why, of course Tom's honest!" said Et Cætera, hotly, whereat Mrs. Pete was sorry, and answered:

"Why, of course! That's what I said."

"Then," said the poet, "I did—don't suppose he left you much money?"

"You bet not. He goes and takes out all the money; I stays and"—she laughed happily—"takes in washin'!"

"Yes!" The poet at last had something to grasp. "That is what we came for. We have a lot of wash—"

"Oh, thanks!" cried Mrs. Pete, happily. "I'd rather wash for you-uns than most. I'll send Billy over for it. You and Pete's been good friends ever since—" she laughed. "What is it?"

"Si—socks," said the poet.

"Socks," nodded the composer.

"Socks," added Et Cetera. "Three pairs."

"Gee!" laughed Mrs. Pete, "nothin' but socks!"

"Shirts," said Richard, cunningly.

"Ah," said Mrs. Pete, "I just love to wash shirts. Whenever I wash Pete's I think of him. They're so full of tar and tobacco. And, you know, that's so hard to git out."

She had addressed Dick.

The poet had been fishing through his pockets and had found a dollar bill and thirty cents in change. This he was putting together on his palm. The composer, seeing, and understanding what the poet was about, found a couple of dollars and some change, which he added to the hoard upon the poet's palm. Richard contributed a new Columbia half-dollar—carried for a pocket-piece—and even small Et Cetera found seven cents in the corner of a handkerchief. The poet passed it all to the palm of the wondering Mrs. Pete. The towheads had gathered round—the last one climbing up the leg of the next one.

"Hello, stepladder!" laughed Mrs. Pete. "But, say, what's all this?"

The money on her palm.

"Thi—thought we'd just pay you in advance," said the poet. "We've got so much mouny."

"Well, I'll be durned!" said Mrs. Pete. "First time that ever happened to me! Well—will some of yous keep account? I got no head for figures."

That was a very unhappy winter for all the happy four—and especially the poet.

And though he wrote poetry frenziedly (for there were almost no clients) in order to keep up his reputation for riches

with Mrs. Pete, no one seemed to want poetry that winter. And though the composer descended to songs instead of operas, no one seemed to want to sing that winter. Indeed, the only ones who did better than usual, or better than they expected, were the small Et Cetera and Richard, who made and sold jig-saw puzzles, putting the money faithfully aside in a milk-jar for the day they knew that Mrs. Pete would need it.

For it grew worse and worse. Pete, who should have returned in three weeks, had not come in ten—twenty. And the snow was on the ground. Instead of the flowering vines, there were icicles at the eaves of Pete's house—and little enough warmth within. It was hard to give the money from the milk-jar to the despairing young wife—often in bed now. Finally she began to take a little now and then—when the poet would carry it down to her—leaving it at such places as he knew she would soon find.

"It's up to me," sighed the poet, "to see her through the mischief I've made—till Pete gets back—"

"With the money," added Et Cetera, with a certain faith never quite lost.

"And if he never gets back?" asked Dick, in that way of comundrums.

"Then Tom must marry her," said Et Cetera, decisively.

"Lord!" said the poet, wiping the perspiration, though it was cold weather.

"And the whole stepladder," finished Et Cetera—and meant it.

"Lord!" whispered the poet again.

"No use for a stepladder?" laughed Dick.

"Needs a fire-escape," added Harry, grimly.

Then came The Great Blizzard—as it is known to this day—which, by the way, is not far from the day of this story. For three days the snow had fallen, the thermometer had descended, and the winds had raged. Then, when a road had been ploughed for trains—which took three days more—the poet put all the money of the happy four into his breast pocket and went to the beach.

The poet had said he would return—perhaps the same day. But it was fortunate that, even at the station, he had



Drawn by F. Walter Taylor

"I'M GOING TO SEE THAT YOU GET EVERYTHING YOU WANT"

thought of adding a basket of meats and provisions to his luggage. He did not return. For when he had fought his way through the stillness to the door of Pete's house a soft wailing came through. And when he pressed on, through the panes thick with frost peered a nosegay of small gaunt faces. Mrs. Pete's face was not among them.

She was in bed, with a very crimson infant by her side. She, too, was gaunt. The poet shrank back against the door, while the stepladder disengaged itself and crawled to the basket. Small and grimy hands made short work of the order within. Even the next-to-the-last step bit ravenously at a piece of raw meat. The poet left the basket there, with the snarling little animals about it, and went to the bed, where the wan and voiceless body held out a hand to him.

"You see," it whispered, "we haven't been able to lay up much for the winter. And I guess everybody thought we did—like when Pete was here—and let us alone—though there is no one very near. Bib—but there was nothin' in the house for two days before the blizzard, and that has been five. I couldn't send the ladder. It is too small for such weather. It would have died. I'd rather have 'em die here—with me."

And Mrs. Pete sobbed gently.

"That's what it looked like till you come. You see—"

She eloquently uncovered the newly born child. And with the woe of want on her pretty face, came also the mother-smile.

"I expect you think I'm sorry he come—it's a boy—when there was trouble enough. But I'm not!"

She madly kissed the child, and, Heaven help him, the poet did too, and helped with the crying.

The mother pointed to where the ladder devoured the raw contents of the basket. "I expect he sends you everything you ast for. I expect you're real good!"

"Yes," lied the poet, choking in his throat. "I have about everything I want. And—"

He looked about and saw the new baby, swaddled in rumpled linings of

Pete's old coats, the neglected ladder, clothed in the rest of Pete's old garments—the unswept corners—the whole air of dejection—then he finished what he meant to say:

"And I'm going to see that you get everything *you* want—"

Then, noting the hope it brought to the wan face on the bed, he went one better—"And something besides!"

So cheered was Mrs. Pete that she said: "I wish I had some mashed potatoes! Coffee! Oh, I wasn't hungry till you come!"

Well, the poet never succeeded in getting her everything she wanted. Perhaps even a wiser and richer poet than he might not have done so. But he got her the coffee and potatoes then and there—though it was a close shave. For the coffee had to be rescued from a portion of the stepladder, and each potato had been gnawed by small ravenous teeth.

Harry got a telegram to hurry down too. And, of course, Richard and Et Cetera went along. They were exhorted in the wire to bring a bunch of medicines of a rather strange nature, and the poet had added in explanation:

"Baby."

Then he had further added:

"Potatoes! Coffee! Coal-oil!"

Of course no one could know precisely what such a telegram might mean. But the brief Et Cetera said:

"I'd take lots of potatoes and coffee along. And some coal-oil. I saw that they had an oil-stove. And they always had mashed potatoes and coffee—and babies—all together—when I was there."

"Baby—coffee—coal-oil! How *does* he mix them?" mused Dick.

They found the poet washing the dishes. He had cooked the dinner. He had attended the little towheads. And there in the bed poor little Mrs. Pete, wan and big-eyed. All was soon explained by the poet, the ladder, and the surroundings. Mrs. Pete said nothing—only holding out a hand. She was better. But she soon let them know that there was little comfort in living without Pete.

"He has been here when every baby but this one was born. And I'm going to name it after him. Little Pete. Yes, that's his name."

"I might as well put the crape on the door," she added. "Look there!"

At last there seemed news of Pete. She handed Richard a newspaper in which a wreck in the icy sea was told about. Among the names of the dead was one Peter Puttersson.

"But there must be many Peter Putterssons in the world," comforted Richard.

"That's *my* Pete, all right, all right," sobbed the girl. "I may as well send for Ram."

Ram was the undertaker from the main.

"Don't tell me there's another woman," cried Mrs. Pete, suddenly, out of a dry silence.

"Poor devil!" whispered the grimy poet to the other three. "That, too!" To Mrs. Pete he said, stontly: "Of course there is no other woman. The idea! Pete couldn't!"

"Not on your life!" cried Dick, adding to the general security by an unaccustomed allowance of slang.

"Just look! You all have that faith in him like it could move a sand-hill! And me—I—I've doubted him! My Pete! Oh, I've just laid here and seen him with one of them there English or Scotch lassies—hair yellower 'n mine. Clothes tucked up like these here summer ladies in their barling-suits. Why, I've *heard* him tell her—or them—for it's not always the same person—I've heard him admire dark hair!—how he loved 'em—while he's crossin' a stream with 'em on a log—holdin'—on—ri—round the waist—so's they can't fall off the log! Who'd want to fall off a log when my Pete's arm was round 'em!"

"Nonsense!" cried the lachrymose poet, not entirely opportunely.

"Nonsense?" cried Mrs. Pete, misunderstanding the poet entirely and relapsing into her unfaith: "if you'd ever loved my Pete, you'd know how fascinatin' he is with women. And them there milkmaids and shepherdesses I sees in books—"

She broke down completely and could go no further.

And Dick, dropping tears all over the pretty face, bent and said:

"Why, you lovely little goose, there is not one of them to compare with you! There are no such blue eyes anywhere!"

There will be no such peachy cheeks ditto—when they cheer up a bit and grow more plump! Cheer up! Be ready to bloom for him the moment he comes! For he *will* come! And the moment may be very near!"

"Yes," chimed in the chorus, variously, "the moment may be very near! Look out!"

"Say—I believe you," cried the lady Pete. "Bring me that lookin'-glass!"

And is not this the sign of renewed life to any woman—to ask for her mirror?

"There's a fresh nightie there," suggested Mrs. Pete, pointing to a curtain draped from nails against the wall. "I kep' it to have the baby in—but Pete wasn't here and it didn't matter. Now I'll wear it to—to welcome him home in."

And while the guests turned their backs Mrs. Pete got into the pretty, fresh nightie; then:

"Why—my God!" she cried. "Why do I do this—as if he was comin' right in!"

And she would have torn the garment off, regardless of all present, if all present had not joined in preventing the catastrophe.

"It's bad luck!" she persisted. "Now I know he's dead!"

"Listen, you gilly," cried the savage Et Cætera. "It's *good* luck. Don't you know it's expectin'—wishing for things—which makes them happen? Once I wished for a *bite* of fudge—and a whole box came in the next mail!"

That night they all slept in the drift-wood house of one room which Pete had built for his bride when she was called "The Belle of the Beach."

The blizzard continued all the night—growing worse toward morning. Then they knew that there was trouble at the station, not far away, for, first, there was the sound of a gun at sea, then, that of the gun with which the guards fired the life-line.

The poet and the composer ran to the beach, leaving Richard and Et Cætera to take care of Mrs. Pete and the step-ladder. They could hear the shouting through the storm, and still another shot from the station gun. Then for a while there was quiet—until Richard and Et

Cætera heard the measured tread of men carrying something.

Both the poet and the composer were armored in glittering ice, and the thing they carried between them had on its armor.

Richard blocked the door bodily so that the sick girl might not see. Et Cætera put the stepladder under the bed. But so far as Mrs. Pete was concerned it was useless.

"It's my Pete, all right," she sobbed. "Let 'em in."

It was her Pete, all right. They brought him in and, when Mrs. Pete had got out of it, they put him on the bed. He seemed very cold—frozen—and quite dead.

Dick and Et Cætera had acted promptly. Cracking the icy armor, first they dragged off Pete's clothing, while the poet and the composer, leaving theirs to melt away, made hot toddy out of the bit of whiskey Dick had smuggled through the lines of the great blizzard.

Now, the composer had some skill in medicine—not as much as he supposed he had, but enough to tell him, after a moment with Pete's pulse, that he wasn't dead at all—though he might be if, as Et Cætera suggested, he wasn't promptly pumped up. This he and the poet proceeded to do, while Richard and Et Cætera held the stepladder and Mrs. Pete dealt out the precious toddy in very small spoonfuls. But he was well frozen, as Et Cætera remarked afterward, and the process was slow.

When they finally brought Pete around the first thing he did was to clap both his hands to his middle as if something hurt him there.

"It's all right, Pete," said the composer.

Pete, still not quite recovered, eyed them suspiciously.

"I dun'no," he said. "But it's there, and you bet it 'll stay. If it stays through such a storm as that there, it 'll stay if you're thieves. Where's Mrs. Pete?"

That lady, now almost recovered from her illness with the joy—which we all know is highly therapeutic—threw herself upon Pete.

"Oh, Pete—roy Pete! No crape on the door—no Ram!—no—"

With a sudden mad joy she bent close and whispered:

"I don't care—Pete, I don't care—if there was a milkmaid—or a shepherdess—a dozen of 'em! I've got you now. And I'll keep you—yes, ag'inst the bunch of 'em!"

"Milkmaid?—shepherdess?" queried Pete, dully, letting his arms go round her, "what are they?"

And Mrs. Pete turned to the four—crying out madly:

"There! Hear that! There *was* none—there was no milkmaid—no shepherdess—he dun't no' what they are! And he'd know if they was. They *was* none. What did I tell you?"

Such are women—God bless 'em! Such is love—God bless it!

But even in his semi-consciousness Pete still searched about his middle, with watchful eyes on all about.

"Hah! She's like the Star-spangled Banner!" he announced, finally.

"Why is she like the Star-spangled Banner?" asked Dick, thinking that Pete referred to some lady.

"Because she's still *there*!" answered Pete.

Then Pete unstrapped a thick leather belt from his waist and handed it to Mrs. Pete.

"It's yours," he said. "See if it's dry—all right. Look out for these here people. If they rush you, shoot."

"Oh, Pete," said Mrs. Pete, "they are all friends—and all have been that kind to me! Look—this is Mr.—"

"Sure!" cried Pete then, recognizing in turn the happy four. "Well, then, let's open up and show 'em! They'll be as glad as us!"

The guilty poet, having also once been in the leather business, knew what such belts were for, and began to suspect this one. So he at once assisted Pete's injunction to open up, and soon was spreading upon the table note after note of the Bank of England. They were damp, yes, but good as gold.

"What is it?" asked Mrs. Pete, when she saw the interest of every one else in it.

"Money!" shouted the happy Pete, rising up in bed, sick no more.

"Money?" wondered Mrs. Pete, who had never seen anything but greenbacks.



Drawn by F. Wesley Taylor

HANDLING THE NOTES OF THE BANK OF ENGLAND LIKE STREET-CAR TRANSFERS

"Thirty millions!" yelled Pete, hugging her, and extracting one of the notes (which had fluttered to the floor) from the mouth of the next-to-the-last step of the ladder.

"I told you so," whispered Et Ootera—which wasn't quite accurate.

"Ni—ni—not thirty millions!" gasped the dizzy poet, to whom such sums were beyond any arithmetic.

"Well, not exactly thirty millions, of course," conceded Pete, while the happy four gaped speechlessly: "we don't want that much, do we, Piggy? But it's enough, enough, all right. You see, they was about fifty Smiths in that there town of Smithfield—"

"Yi—you don't mean to si—say that yi—you found it—si—such a ti—town?" gasped the poet.

"Well, what do you think I am?" demanded Pete, imperially, "to go after a town—a whole burg—and not find it? You bet you! Well, as I was tooting, they was about fifty Smiths in that there town. And by the time I begun to git around I was pretty well advertised and they begun to pity me."

"You really found a Smith who was a smith?" asked Richard.

"Thirteen of 'em," said Pete. "And they all renigged but the last one. And he was a has-been."

"A what?" asked the composer, to whom such things as slang did not come happily.

"A has-been—*was* a smith, but got too giddy to keep it up. Gee! If a man's a smith over there he's always a smith. He's as proud of it as we are of being loafers. Well, when I gets to the unlucky thirteenth, 'Here's where I git it in the Hoosack,' says I. It's thirteen. And when I first puts it up to the guy he says, 'says he, 'So you're the Honest Man from Hameriky?—that's what the newspapers took to calling me—and bloomin' crank—pokin' fun all the time. Also, they tells about all the Smiths—in fun—sort of comic family tree—that's the way I learns about this here perticular Smith—which he is called the richest and most liberal—and excentrick—having a 'sylum for one-legged cripples—where they kin git wooden legs free—and a whole county for crippled children to roam about in.

"You cawn't make me believe, sir, that ye coom half the way hower 'ere to—"

"You bet you I did," says I, "and I'm a-gon to git it or know the reason why! You ain't a-gon to escape me without the newspapers gitting it. And I'll tell *you* that if the yellows in the Land of the Brave and the Home of the Free once gits after you, it's all over with you. So you'd better make good!"

"Now you don't soy?" he says, laughin' like he'd bust. "Hi didn't fawney there was an honest man hower there?"

"They's one or two more," says I, "but I got the call on 'em all because I found it first."

"Found lawhat?" says he—like he'd never heard of that will—and I ups and tells him.

"Well, such a laugh as he broke out you never heard."

"What language is that you speak?" says he.

"Hamerican, he gosh!" says I, imitating him real good.

"He laughs some more—really enjoyin' himself."

"So you're honest?" says he.

"You bet you," says I. "Honester as you."

"Why, sir," says he—and his whiskers, which he wears under his chin like a rooster wears his when he molts, bristled.

"Aw," says I, "because you're a-practisin' false pertences."

"And how's that, sir?" says he, still enjoyin' himself.

"Because you're alive when you says you're dead? I ups and tells him—which of course he knows—and laughs like he was eatin' up every word.

"Well, say, he's about the gamest old sport I ever see! He tells me that a will's no good until a man is dead—and he ain't dead—not yet—and henceforth he ain't compelled to obey that will; and I fell down, down, down, until I thunk I'm about the middle of the carth. For that there's so. It's common sense. 'Well,' says I, 'how'm I to git back to Mrs. Pete and the stepladder?' And I had to explain that *there* to 'im—them Englistmen's brains is slow—but sure. 'Oh!' he says then. And nobby he'll help me out a bit, so's I kin git home, and a little on the side—not thirty millions—and

to wait till he's dead—and he'll not forget me then—if I don't forget him—as you bet you I won't.

"'Well, young man,' he says, 'bif you'll come 'ere to-morrow, at three precisely, I will give you—not hexactly thirty millions—but heneough to make you thankful that you *are* an honest mau—as I believe you are—and I'll ask you to fulfil the terms of this instrument by erecting the said monument to me upon my demise,' an' he laughed—an' laughed an' laughed, meanin' the will.

"Well, you bet you I was there, in the front hall, when the town clock struck three. And, on the minute, the footman, all gold up his front and down his back, took me to the nice old gent with the ruff of faded spinage. Well, he counted money till I got tired—and didn't care when he stopped.

"Then he says good-by, and he says, says he: 'Thank the gent who sent you to me—with a certificate of honesty. He has done better than he, perhaps, thought.'

"Say, what did he mean? And who? You?"

"Not me, I suppose," faltered the poet.

"Well, you gov me the cert?" declared Pete, shaking his head in a mystification which was never to be resolved.

"Anyhow," Pete went on, "he ladles out that there mon!"

"And ten minutes later I was at the dock. Well, the only thing I found there, going my way, was that there schooner out there in the snrf. She was rotten—any one could see that—being built in eighteen-one.

"'Matey,' says I, 'want an able-bodied seaman?'

"Lord! They looked at me like I was crazy, and then grabbed me with both hands—and I'm off for Mrs. Pete and the ladder—and yous. But the bloomin' lubbers—I got that word over there—all abandoned ship in the night, at Lewes, takin' all the boats, and leavin' me aboard dreamin' of Mrs. Pete and the ladder, lein' played out by my watch in the storm. When I woke—well, you know what's been going on in the weather line for a week—the ship and I were

alone on the ocean, and I had to stay or go overboard—which I made up my mind I'd put off as long as possible—thinking, mebbe, the way the storm lay, we might drive along here, and the boys at station ninety-one might be expectin' me.

"Well, they was. But, you bet you, I done some tall prayin' to git 'em there, and to git the ship there. Say, the Lord's a mighty good sort, you bet you!"

And each of the happy four said Amen!

"Say," said Pete at last, "how much does the old woman owe yous?"

"Ni—nothing!" gasped the poet.

"Nothing? Come off! How much? I pay my own debts and her'n too!"

Pete was handling the notes of the Bank of England like street-car transfers.

"Not a cent!" said the composer.

"Et Cetera, how much? Don't *you* be a liar, too," adjured Pete, waving the whole bunch of notes.

"I—I don't know," stammered Et Cetera, dazedly. For the impossible treasure-ship had come in at last.

"Mr. Pete," began Richard, "if you please—"

"How *much*?" shouted Pete, terribly.

"Do you suppose I can't pay? I'm as rich as you!"

"Yes," sighed the poet.

"Will this do?" asked Pete. "Then, this?"

He tried to thrust two of the bills into the pocket of the poet.

"Please take it," smiled the little wife.

"What you done can't be paid at all in money. But—"

She began to cry into her apron at the recollection of it, and the top step of the ladder commanded, reproachfully:

"Plenath!"

Whereupon the guilty poet took the note.

"Oh, I forgot!" cried Mrs. Pete. What she had forgotten was to facilitate the acquaintance of Pete with his last-born. She brought him and put him into Pete's arms—with dramatic suddenness.

And Pete gathered Mrs. Pete and the latest step of the ladder, and as many other steps as could crowd in, to his arms—and nothing more needed to be said.

And there was a great feast in the little driftwood house that night yet—of coffee and mashed potatoes.